

FINAL BILL REPORT

2SHB 2078

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Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Establishing the outdoor learning grant program.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Rule, Barkis, Ryu, Fitzgibbon, Simmons, Shewmake, Berry, Leavitt, Berg, Senn, Callan, Dent, Johnson, J., Kloba, Bergquist, Chambers, Wicks, Orwall, Tharinger, Taylor, Klippert and Pollet).

House Committee on Education
House Committee on Appropriations
Senate Committee on Ways & Means

Background:

Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

In addition to its constitutional charge of supervising all matter pertaining to public schools, the Superintendent of Public Instruction and its office have numerous and broad responsibilities prescribed in statute, including:

- making rules and regulations necessary for the administration of public education requirements;
- preparing courses of study and other materials and books for the discharge of education duties;
- fulfilling financial responsibilities, including distributing legislatively allocated funds to districts for the operation of the public school system, and awarding numerous state and federally funded grants; and
- satisfying numerous reporting and other duties assigned by the Legislature.

The Superintendent of Public Instruction, subject to applicable requirements, is also required to approve requests by public schools to consider student participation in seasonal or nonseasonal outdoor-based activities as instructional days for the purposes of basic education requirements.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Washington Outdoor School Study.

In September 2021, the Center for Economic and Business Research at Western Washington University released the Washington State Outdoor School Study. The report was prepared in response to a request from the Legislature to assess the feasibility and benefits of expanding outdoor residential school programs to serve fifth and sixth grade students. The report contained seven recommendations, including:

- funding at least one outdoor school program at a Washington State Parks and Recreation, Department of Natural Resources, or Department of Fish and Wildlife facility in each of Washington's nine educational service districts;
- allowing residential and day programs ranging in length from three to five days to be eligible for outdoor school funding; and
- creating a list of standard learning outcomes for outdoor schools and requiring that programs meet a certain number of outcomes to qualify for funding.

2021-23 Operating Budget.

In the 2021-23 Operating Budget, \$10 million was provided to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the Washington School Principals' Education Foundation (WSPEF) to support pandemic-related learning loss through outdoor learning and overnight camp experiences. The provision required the WSPEF and the OSPI to provide grants to school districts to partner with accredited residential outdoor schools to provide up to 20,000 fifth and sixth grade students with up to five days of outdoor learning at an overnight camp. The outdoor schools were required to provide curriculum aligned to state learning standards and provide opportunities for accelerated learning.

Summary:

The Outdoor Learning Grant Program (grant program) is established to develop and support educational experiences for public school students. In implementing the grant program, school districts and outdoor education providers should ensure equitable access for students in all geographic regions, and high levels of accessibility for students with disabilities.

Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

The OSPI is directed to administer the grant program. Beginning in the 2022-23 school year, the OSPI must award grants to eligible school districts, federally recognized tribes, and outdoor education providers. Eligible school districts include state-tribal education compact schools. The OSPI may consult with the Washington Recreation and Conservation Office in awarding grants. The grant program must consist of two types of grants:

- allocation-based grants for school districts to develop or support educational experiences; and
- competitive grants for federally recognized tribes and outdoor education providers to increase capacity for outdoor learning experiences.

Beginning in 2024, the OSPI must submit an annual report with an evaluation of the grant program to the Legislature. The report may include information on other outdoor education

and instructional time efforts and how those efforts compare with other programs funded through the grant program.

In administering the grant program, the OSPI may partner with the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, the Department of Natural Resources, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Washington Department of Agriculture, and the Washington Conservation Commission for purposes of exchanging relevant expertise on land management and work-integrated learning experiences and opportunities.

The Outdoor Education Experiences Program (experiences program) is established within the grant program to develop and support outdoor learning opportunities for fifth and sixth grade students, with related opportunities for high school students to volunteer as counselors. The Superintendent of Public Instruction, subject to applicable requirements, must consider the experiences program as instructional days for the purposes of basic education requirements. The program must consist of hands-on learning experiences that:

- are three to five days in duration and up to four nights;
- are overnight or day programs when overnight programs are impractical due to health, cultural, or capacity considerations; and
- have a focus on environmental education aligned with the Washington learning standards and the development of social and emotional learning skills.

The OSPI may work with a statewide nonprofit organization representing school principals to create guidelines for the experiences program. In implementing the experiences program, the OSPI must give priority focus to schools that have been identified for improvement through the Washington School Improvement Framework and communities historically underserved by science education. Examples of these communities are provided and include: federally recognized tribes, including state-tribal education compact schools; schools with high free and reduced-price lunch populations; students of color; and students receiving special education services.

Votes on Final Passage:

House	92	6	
Senate	44	3	(Senate amended)
House	92	5	(House concurred)

Effective: June 9, 2022